# World Chronicle

UNITED NATIONS

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## UNITED NATIONS FOUNDATION

American media tycoon, Ted Turner, announced last September that he was donating one billion US dollars to the United Nations. In this interview, Timothy E. Wirth, President of the United Nations Foundation, which will disburse the money, discusses the reasons behind Mr. Turner's generous gift and the projects that the Foundation will be supporting in its first round of grants.

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**ANNOUNCER:** From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**. On September 18, 1997, businessman Ted Turner announced a generous and historic gift in support of United Nations causes. This donation will support the United Nations in achieving the goals and objectives of the UN Charter and encourage greater understanding of the promise and purpose of international cooperation through the United Nations. Mr. Turner's gift is in the form of Time-Warner stock with a value up to $1 billion. The gift is to be paid in ten annual installments of $100 million each to the United Nations Foundation and other charities established to support UN causes. In today's **World Chronicle**, we will discuss Mr. Turner's gift with Timothy Wirth, a former member of the United States Senate and, until recently, US Under-Secretary of State for Global Affairs. Mr. Wirth is the President of the United Nations Foundation. Joining me to talk with Mr. Wirth are Bhaskar Menon of *International Documents Review* and Barbara Crossette of *The New York Times*.

Mr. Wirth welcome to **World Chronicle**.

**WIRTH:** Delighted to be here, Michael. Thank you for asking me.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Senator Wirth is what I guess that I should call you and that's how we'll address you for the rest of the query time.

**WIRTH:** Whatever works.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** On the occasions when I've been able to ask questions that you might have heard -- I've got a little bit of a problem with my throat. Senator, why was it necessary to establish a foundation to decide how to distribute this money? Why not just throw it at the UN and let the UN decide what to do with it?

**WIRTH:** Mr. Turner, when he made the gift, Michael, made it to UN causes, not to the UN and he wanted to pick and choose a few areas, in particular. The Board of the Foundation is focused on its criteria for selection of projects to focus on issues that were prevention in nature, that have a sense of urgency to them, and gauge grassroots bottoms up, so that societies have a way of engaging the private sector wherever possible -- a number of criteria -- and to be very innovative. This is not to be business as usual. It's not to be a -- this normal programme of the UN, but to truly be incremental and additional resources. I think in any large institution, if you just put more money in it, it tends to get spread around to -- everybody gets a certain percentage and the money disappears very quickly. A billion dollars might appear to be a lot of money, but it can also -- around the world, it can disappear very rapidly unless it's targeted, followed up and worked in a very concerted way. So that's the purpose of the Foundation.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** But the bureaucracy that's going to be sort of administering this money, how much percentage of the total annual funds available will be spent on that?

**WIRTH:** Oh, I'd say we'll be spending less than 6 percent overall including the office that we're setting up within the UN and our own endeavour. And our own endeavour also is involved with a whole lot of other things that are outside the UN. That compares, I think, with most foundations you'll find are somewhere between 12 and 20 percent of the funding that they're giving out and we're going to keep this at very minimum -- use NGO's, use existing institutions as much as possible but not a continuing foundation.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** But the UN has set up its own special little bureaucratic unit for it, too, hasn't it?

**WIRTH:** Well, we set up an office within the Secretary-General's Office to be our interface in the United Nations.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Headed up by an Assistant-General?

**WIRTH:** To be headed up by a man named Miles Stoby, a Guyanese long-term United Nations civil servant. We are paying for that Office so that nobody can suggest that the UN system or that other countries were subsidizing the United Nations Foundation.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** How can you pay the salary of an Assistant Secretary-General of the UN?

**WIRTH:** We're paying a percent -- we're paying a certain percentage that goes into the pile of the UN and we've agreed that that will cover his salary. And that's all been run through the appropriate legal entities of the UN. This is a new and innovative programme. I don't think anybody has ever tried to do anything like this. There are a lot of people who have questions about it. Some people, I'm sure, who feel threatened by it. But I think most people are very excited by the opportunity it presents.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Why do they feel threatened?

**WIRTH:** I don't know you tell me. I mean, anything that's new, anything that's different, and anything that comes from the outside -- private sector engagement and that sort of thing -- I mean, you know, generally, governments have a way of thinking we know best and you know, they're threatened often by grassroots activities, they are threatened often by civil society, by private sector -- you know that. I've been in government. I know what it's like. You know it's easier to say, 'hey, we're here, we know what to do. Don't leave us alone. We'll all handle it'. Well, you know, governments shouldn't be left alone -- governments should be challenged and asked and pushed on a steady basis and that's true of my government and the United Nations, it's true of the United States Senate, it's true of the United Nations, it's true of every government around the world, I'm sure.

**MENON:** To ask a philosophical question on this particular issue over the last few years, there's been a growing privatization of areas which were traditionally considered entirely public sector -- education, health, even prisons in the United States. Now, internationally, when major corporations come in and enter into a relationship with the UN, there are certain areas which need to be defined. For instance, just a simple question that you, as someone coming from the outside would answer -- how will you judge whether the work you do is successful or not? By what criteria would you judge your success?

**WIRTH:** First of all, we're not going to do anything proper that isn't there and directly within the mandates of the United Nations and we would do everything within agreed upon policies, policies agreed upon by 185 Member States. And so, we're -- you know -- operating also very closely with the Secretary-General's Office. We want to be sure that we're strengthening his hand and not further adding to any fragmentation in the United Nations for doing just the opposite. So we're very concerned about this being part of the Secretary-General's overall efforts to strengthen and reform the UN. In terms of specific programmes, we are very -- we're determined that we'll be able to monitor very carefully, not only our funds, but the impact of our funds. Increasingly, in this day and age, I think private sector is becoming more and more involved. You know, we no longer look at government programmes just on the basis of how much money is going into something, or how many people are working on it, but start to think about what the outcomes are going to be. And we are going to be very involved in having any programmes that we fund, be outcomes-oriented rather than inputs-oriented. There's a big difference in the way you think about it. We will have, as part of each one of our programmes, a pretty sophisticated monitoring system, which will be consistent with agreements reached with the United Nations, as well.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** But how can you do that, Senator? You can't send monitors out into the field, can you?

**WIRTH:** Well, we could work through an agreement with the United Nations very consistent with agreements the United Nations has had with other donor groups like the EU. And we build a lot of our monitoring programmes based upon the agreements earlier reached with the EU ...

**LITTLEJOHNS:** European Union ...

**WIRTH:** ... similar to the European Union. A similar kind of a package of monitoring that companies' donations coming through UNICEF, we use those two models so we're building upon programmes that have already been established. You know, and we think that's an important thing to do. But there is, I mean, a lot of you raise an interesting question about, you know, how much private sector is going to be engaged. Well, increasingly, they are. We used to think that governments and central governments were the way in which things ought to be done --

PTTs, for example -- in the telecommunications area. Well, I mean, that's now devolving and that kind of change in decentralization is coming about and that's a good thing. It's a very healthy phenomena.

**MENON:** True, it is. I agree with you. But the question was, how would you judge your performance. For instance, a year from now, if you were sitting across a table with your board members and you said this worked, this didn't work -- will be the criteria for the ...

**CROSSETTE:** Let's go back a step. When you're sitting with your board members now or last week and you chose this first project, is there a tendency to want to choose something very discreet, specific, concrete so that it is, at least in the initial stages, easy to watch? Something that -- because you mentioned earlier not to just throw the money into the pot and let it get filtered around -- but something that is very targeted, for example, West Timor -- how much more ...

**MENON:** East Timor ...

**CROSSETTE:** No, no, no. West Timor.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** West Timor.

**CROSSETTE:** How much more concrete, you know, can be than that? That's ...

**WIRTH:** Well, we want to do both things, Barbara. That's a good question. I mean, we want to do both immediate items so that we can demonstrate, as the Secretary-General has said, projects that have a beginning, a middle and an end so that we can demonstrate that this sort of engagement of private capital coming into the UN system can be constructive, can have results, and those results can be measured and seen. So, I have some short-term projects and then we thoroughly -- we're working very hard to develop, you know, a number of longer-term initiatives. One that we've talked about before, for example, is focussing on adolescents and girls. You know. This has been a central concern of United Nations agreed upon policy in Cairo and in Beijing and elsewhere.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Population Conference ...

**WIRTH:** A lot of policy on population -- well, Cairo it's population and development, in Beijing was the Beijing Women's Conference -- but a major concern on adolescents, education of girls, women's reproductive health, a whole series of question surrounding that particular critical time. We'd like to see, if working carefully with Carol Bellamy, the Head of the United Nations UNICEF, and with Nafis Sadik, the Head of the Population Programme and maybe with Gro Brundtland, the new Head of the World Health Organization, that we might be able to develop a very long-term -- by that three, five longer than that years' programme -- where we would put resources behind. We'd be searching for other kinds of resources and see if we can really put together a concerted programme. We'd be able to show results next week or next year, probably not. But we hope to be able to show real result two or

three years out, absolutely.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Are you going to have a bias toward women's programmes?

**WIRTH:** Yes.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Barbara, you'll take him up on that?

**CROSSETTE:** Well, yes, in fact there are several questions that arise. One was asked, I think, too, earlier today in a press conference about whether you had, in fact, chosen so many women's programmes for political pressures with the lowercase 'P' because there has been such an emphasis on promoting women in the UN system because -- maybe it's not going as far as it should -- because in the United States Senate there seems to be a freeze on a lot of population programmes because of fears of money going to abortion and so on. That's one of them but, anyway, you could start there.

**WIRTH:** We were putting an emphasis on civil society in particular, women in civil society, not because of pressures that come within the UN or because of pressures that are existing in the United States, certainly, because it's the right thing to do. You know, if we look a long-term at where our society is going, women are more than, you know, 50 percent of the population of the world. Women are significantly under-represented in the process of governance or the process of financial institutions. And if the evidence is increasingly to work like the Grameem Bank in Mohammed Younus in Bangladesh that, certainly, all of the testimony and evidence that we have received at the Cairo Conference on Population and Development of the engagement of women economically and legally and politically -- it really empowers them, it's very good for economic development. It's one of the basics. If you educate girls, you know, you have an enormous impact and girls are disproportionately uneducated in the world and absolutely imperative that we put a greater emphasis, not only in enrolling girls, but keeping them in school over a longer period of time. That has a major economic influence. I think we have learned a lot about that and certainly there's a lot of history from the members of our Board and there are commitments in this area and a lot of that commitment is being put to work through the UN Foundation. And these are all, again, very consistent with the goals and outlines established by the UN over the years.

**MENON:** Could I change the focus of -- one of the missions you've undertaken for the UN Foundation is to tell the UN story -- to tell the American people what the UN is, how it works, how it relates to their lives. But, which UN do you mean -- because there are several -- when you say the United Nations, it's not a single entity. There is the Security Council, there is the General Assembly, there is the Economic and Social Council, there's the Secretariat. And these different bodies do not all act -- they have the same dynamic, nor do they have the same effect nor are they all saleable. For instance, we try to sell the Security Council given what

happened in Rwanda -- 800 thousand people or about a million people died in that country -- and the Security Council did not act. This is a major scandal of historic proportions. How are you going to explain this? How -- in which part of the UN are you going to sell?

**WIRTH:** Well, first of all, there are many, many stories to be told within the United Nations and I suspect that none of them were the ones that you're suggesting. I can't imagine trying to go out and tell the people of Des Moines something about the environment or ECOSOC or the Security Council, I mean, you know, what is that? All right -- that's sort of selling political process. It's about as dull and irrelevant a story as one can imagine. Much more important, is to talk about 'well, this is the contribution that the United Nations is making to a stable economy around the world'. And this is why to the soy bean farmers in Iowa, you know that it is terribly important that this kind of market -- stable market mechanism -- exists and that we have the capacity of having open financial institutions that survive around the world, that allow free commerce to occur and the United Nations is critical that this is happening and that's why it's important to farm bureau and Black Hawk County, Iowa.

**MENON:** But this is ...

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Just a minute. Just a minute. This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Timothy Wirth, President of the United Nations Foundation.

**MENON:** No, I mean, usually, when the UN is pictured in the public mind, there are two visions -- one is the far right-wing vision of conspiratory law organization with black helicopters waiting to take over the country and on the other hand, you have this idealistic vision of the UN where it's doing good, it's, you know, making the airplanes fly around the world, it's doing lot of -- poor kids, and stuff, but in between these two visions is the reality of it which is, where the United Nations is an organization where world power is, in a way, interacts. That is what makes it popular -- that is what makes it important.

**WIRTH:** The important thing is what is relevant to people. I mean, saying ECOSOC or Security Council or General Assembly -- that is not relevant again to the farmer in Iowa. What is relevant to the farmer in Iowa is the fact that the markets are there for his soy beans. What's relevant to him is that his wife is very interested in women's engagement and the UN is involved in that and she believes in that. What's relevant -- maybe his daughter who's a member of the garden club of Des Moines and the garden club of Des Moines has a real commitment to the integrity of the environment around the world and the United Nations System is very important and his son is really worried about weather patterns in the future of Iowa and that has a lot to do with climate change and climate change is something of real interest to that family in Iowa and the United Nations is a critical broker on the issue of climate change. Make it -- what does it mean to people, what does exactly it mean to people around the world.

**MENON:** So you are incessantly to engage them at the visceral level?

**WIRTH:** Sure, if not a visceral level, what's it mean to them? I mean they're going to have obstruction to talking about the General Assembly. I mean, you know -- you ask anybody, what's the General Assembly or what's the Security -- I mean, that's not...

**CROSSETTE:** Institutionally, I mean, hasn't the mistake -- I think polling is now showing this in this country. The mistake is often been to talk to the American in public in sort of a geo strategic terms or something. And yet, other polling shows, when presented as something like, 'are you worried about the future of your children, are you concerned about epidemic diseases' -- everyone has an opinion on immigration or migration that to tie all these things together, increasingly, is to look to a world organization, where these things are tied together and this is not also in single issue politics that Americans have really brought into the Organization. One sees that here all the time with people who come to conferences and NGO meetings, and so on. But if you ask them, in the old fashion way, are you interested in world affairs or whatever, they may say 'no'.

**WIRTH:** And also, there's a change -- in fact there's a very significant shift going on there. Most of the foreign policy apparatus is still in the cold war mold. You know when that is big institutions that's big power politics that's all kind of geo-political-military engagement. And we're going into the 21st century and the things that are relevant to people, I think now, are jobs and the environments and opportunities and health -- AIDS that they're concerned about, you know, AIDS and what's happening in infectious diseases -- these are the things that means something to people day in and day out and they can see it -- tangible. The UN has a wonderful set of stories to tell and we think, you know, that we want to be of assistance in helping to tell those stories.

**CROSSETTE:** Taking you back into your programmes -- just to ask one question on an area which is increasingly, among development experts, important -- the building of democracies, the building of institutions by word that we were just throwing aside. But any way, judiciaries, police forces, that kind of thing -- and this is an area where many governments are a little bit squeamish about getting involved and, in fact, some international institutions, although not the UN -- how do you feel about this? Is this an area you'd rather shy away from or could get involved in with the Foundation over a period of time?

**WIRTH:** First of all, I've corrected earlier any misunderstanding. I mean, institutions are enormously important. But you don't go out and sell institutions, you can't -- you know, that's not -- you have to do something specific. What does it mean to an individual -- you don't sell an abstract institution -- what's it mean to me? On a democratic institution, it's terribly important that there be a kind of transparency saying 'the world financial system'. You know, why

is that important? Would that means the -- having that sort of transparency, people can have a better understanding, their money is not going to get stolen if they invest around the world. You can have a greater flow of capital around the world, that the soy bean farmer, again in Iowa, knows that there is a flow of funds and his soy beans are going to be bought in a particular place and somebody might do features on his soy beans and if he might be able to make a bit of a margin because there's a market that works in some particular area. Now, this transparency also goes to human rights -- so fundamental to United Nations, as you know, Barbara. You know, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is probably, you know, **the fundamental** -- sort of seminal -- document of the United Nations, much like the Bill of Rights for the United States Constitution. Well, those are controversial human rights commitments -- like the Bill of Rights is, in many ways, controversial-- right? But we want to support that. We want to be out there saying this is important. These are, you know, the freedom from a kind of torture, you know, freedom from being coerced politically. These are very important universal values and they're part of transparency and democracy and we want to help the UN, help Mary Robinson, who is the High Commissioner for Human Rights, to promote those fundamental values. .

**MENON:** One of the things you have set out to do, is to raise additional money. Is to get, I should say, to find other Ted Turners in other countries. I don't know -- you must have built at a very large number of rich people to become a senator -- do you think that this is a doable thing? Is Ted Turner an exceptional figure in history or are there other people out there willing to give a billion dollars?

**WIRTH:** Well, the answer is 'yes' on all three things. One, Ted Turner is an exceptional, right? He wouldn't be doing what he'd -- as successful as he has, if he weren't. Second, do we think it's doable? Absolutely. We wouldn't be doing that if we didn't. Third, are there are other people out there? Absolutely.

**MENON:** No, but what success have you had? Have you spoken to any fabulously rich people?

**WIRTH:** Oh, I have. I've had a number of discussions and you know, these things take a period of time. But we're under way and we hope to be able to encourage others to join with us. Either they do it through the UN Foundation or they do it through their own philantrophy or some other approach, doesn't make any difference.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Did you lean on Bill Gates of Microsoft?

**WIRTH:** Excuse me?

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Did you lean on Bill Gates?

**WIRTH:** Oh, Bill Gates has increasingly involved himself. As you know, he has made a significant contribution to the United Nations family planning...

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Yeah, but rather a small amount ... 1.7 million.

**WIRTH:** Well, it might sound small to you. It sounds like a lot to me, Michael, you know.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Touché, it is.

**MENON:** On this thing, what is the *quid pro quo*? I can understand Ted Turner is an idealist, he is a progressive, he is a liberal. But you go to -- the rich are not cast in that mold. I'm in the school with some of the richest people in India, and they would -- I was -- extremely profligate with my money compared to what they did with theirs. They're not in the habit of giving it away, and if they do give it away, what is the *quid pro quo*?

**WIRTH:** Why should there be a *quid pro quo*? I mean, there are people who are -- when Dale Carnegie made an enormous gift to American education through the Carnegie Libraries all across the country, there was no *quid pro quo*. When the Rockefellers set up the Rockefeller Foundation, you know, it did an enormous amount in terms of health and food research, there was no *quid pro quo* that came with that. When Ted Turner sets up the UN Foundation, there was no *quid pro quo* except his enormous satisfaction of being a very significant philanthropist in the area that he believes in. Now, if there is a *quid pro quo*, it's his satisfaction, I mean -- you heard him talk about it, I've heard him talk about it you know. He's enormously gratified being able to do this. Now, is there something else that he's going to do, he's so busy, I can't imagine. If there is anything else that, you know, he's going to want to get out of it other than his sense of satisfaction.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Senator, the UN Relief Agency for Palestine Refugees is in a constant state of lack of funds. Why didn't your Foundation come up with some money for them?

**WIRTH:** Well, as I said at the start of the programme, Michael, we are concerned about trying to do things in the prevention way, we're not and not to do things that governments ought to do. You know, we can't be all things to all people. And we can't cover all UN programmes and we're not going to try to do that. So, we're picking items where there's a sense of urgency, capacity for prevention and areas that are not the purview of governments. We've talked about a number of those here. Although the governments find it more difficult to do -- refugee issues, feeding issues, peacekeeping issues -- those are the jobs of governments. That's a political job.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** You talked quite a bit about the farmer out in Iowa -- soy bean grower -- what are you doing in the area of information to get your message out to people like that?

**WIRTH:** Well, we are embarked upon an ambitious programme, as Papa was asking, to tell a story. There are a lot of stories to be told to the American people, whether it's going to be relevant to them or not -- what the UN does and why it does it and what, why the UN

is important to the average citizen of the United States -- we want to help to do that.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** So you're going to have a public information unit in ....?

**WIRTH:** Well, we're going to establish what we hope will be a pretty sophisticated programme related to, again, telling the story. UN has got a great story to tell -- a lot of telling.

**CROSSETTE:** How can you draw on the very source of your existence -- the Turner Broadcasting people -- because one of the things sort of missing is a picture of the UN -- a human face on the UN. The UN out working in down and dirty places where the danger -- in danger, increasingly in danger -- I doubt that whether it's Iowa or wherever, there are very few opportunities for the garden club or anyone else to get a good video of the UN at work and I'm wondering whether you've thought of this kind of thing, a sort of visual message?

**WIRTH:** First, there is a clear distinction between Ted Turner's personal philanthrophy, which is what this is and Time Warner, CNN, and so on, which is the business side and there's a very sharp line between the two. This is not related to his business activities. But there are a lot of opportunities for telling the story visually. CNN does a wonderful job overall and CNN will, if we can present good stories, CNN will look at those like they'd look at other stories and still make a decision just like with MSNBC, we would hope to comment. We also think that there is another outlet. We also think that there is great opportunity with the Internet, Barbara, that increasingly people are wired or engaged in the Internet and involved or involves them personally and they have a real opportunity to join this together. We're in the process of developing the website right now.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Senator, we have only about a minute left. In the first grounds that were made, although Mr. Turner and his wife, Jane Fonda, are very interested in the environment -- and you are also, of course, you've been a great spokesman for the environment -- no money has gone or available money has gone to the environment?

**WIRTH:** Well, there weren't as many strong projects that came out of the initial request for proposals on the environment as we had hoped there would be and we will continue to have a major emphasis on that front. We just -- we didn't fund everything that came at us, by any means, we picked the proposals which we thought were the strongest and we'll continue to work. We want very much to help strengthen, for example, the United Nations Environment Programme which calls for a very skilled and talented former environment minister in Germany has agreed to take over UNEP, it's a major job, it's a tough job that he has and we want to help him to strengthen UNEP and make that United Nations Environment Programme and make that a more effective body -- people in the United States and around the world care very deeply about the environment and that's, again, one of the major missions of the UN.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Senator Wirth, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of World Chronicle. Our guest has been Timothy Wirth, President of the United Nations Foundation. He was interviewed by Bhaskar Menon of *International Documents Review* and Barbara Crossette of *The New York Times*. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**